drought affected areas of the country including Orissa, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan during 1996-97, 1997-98 and 1998-99;

(b) whether Government's attentation had been drawn to the news-item published in the Hindu of April 17, 1998 captioned "Woman dies of Starvation" reporting recovery of a dead woman's body and other family members writhing in pain from Bhadoti town of Sawai Madhopur district of Rajasthan; and

(c) what comprehensive steps have been taken to ensure that no body dies of hunger and starvation in the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) No reports on starvation deaths have been received from the State Governments during 1995-96 to 1998-99 (so far).

(b) The Government of Rajasthan has reported that the reported death was due to disease and not be due to starvation.

(c) It is Primarily the responsibility of the State Governments concerned to provide relief to the people affected by natural calamities. The Central Government only supplements the efforts of the State Governments by providing additional resources in accordance with the recommendations of the Finance Commission appointed from time to time.

'Root Wilt' Disease in coconut Plantations

1666. SHRI YERRA NARAYANA-SWAMY: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether any efforts have fructified in controlling 'Rootwilt' disease in coconut plantations;

(b) what is the extent of this disease in the Southern States;

(c) whether production of coconuts has fallen due to this disease;

(d) what are the major impediments to improve productivity in coconut plantations; and

(e) what steps have been taken to improve the productivity in cocount plantations in Andhra Pradesh?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) Efforts made so far have not fructified in controlling Cocount 'Root Wilt' disease.

(b) Information received from States indicates that the disease is prevalent in 4.10 lakh hectares in Kerala and 107 hectares in Tamilnadu. A survey conducted during 1996-97 reveals that about 165.50 lakh palms are affected by the disease in Kerala out of which about 80 lakh palms are in advance stage of the disease. In case of Tamilandu, about 20,000 Cocount palms are affected by the disease.

(c) In advance stage of "Root Wilt" disease incidence, significant reduction in yield occurs. According to a survey conducted during 1984, the annual loss due to this disease is about 968 million nuts.

(d) The major impediments in improving the productivity of Coconut as informed by Coconut Development Board are:

(1) Prevalence of the following diseases:

(a) "Root Wilt" in Kerala;

(b) "Thanjavur Wilt" in Tamilnadu;

(c) "Ganoderma Wilt" in Karnataka;

(d) "Tatipaka" in Andhra Pradesh.

(2) Lack of irrigation facilities.

(3) Low use of production inputs and poor management practices.

(4) Large number of small holdings.

(e) The following programmes are implemented by the Coconut Development Board in Andhra Pradesh

to improve productivity of Coconut plantations:—

(i) Integrated farming in coconut small holdings for productivity improvement.

This programme provides incentive subsidy to farmers for the following:

(a) Cutting and removal of disease affected / senile / unproductive palms @Rs. 200/- per palm.

(b) Replanting with quality seedlings @Rs. 5/- per seedling.

(c) Fertilizer application and plant protection measures @ Rs.8/- per palm.

(d) Adoption of multispecies cropping @ Rs. 200/- per ha.

(ii) *Production and distribution of Tall and Dwarf Hybrid seedlings.*

50% financial assistance is given to the State Government under this programme.

(iii) *Establishment of DSP Farm for Coconut.*

A demonstration-cum-Seed production Farm for Coconut is being established by the Coconut Development Board at Vegiwada in West Godawari District of Andhra Pradesh in an area of 179.48 acres.

(iv) *Integrated Control of Leaf eating Caterpillar.*

A parasite breeding laboratory has been sanctioned to multiply and release parasites for control of pest, leaf eating Caterpillar, by extending 50% financial assistance to the State Government.

Floriculture in Maharashtra

1667. MISS SAROJ KHAPARDE : Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have formulated any action plan for the development of commercial floriculture in Maharashtra;

(b) if so, the details thereof?

(c) the funds released to the State for the purpose during the last three years, year-wise; and

(d) the role being played by the State Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) and (b) The Department of Agriculture and Cooperation is implementing a Central Sector Scheme of Commercial Floriculture throughout the country including the State of Maharashtra. The Model Floriculture Centre is being set up at Rajgur Nagar near Pune in Maharashtra, for supply of elite planting material and for training and demonstration purposes. Assistance is also being provided at the rate of Rs. 60,000/- per ha. for expansion of area under flowers.

(c) During the year 1996-97 a sum of Rs. 25 lakhs was released to State under the Scheme. However no funds could be relased during 1995-96 and 1997-98 because of the unspent balance, lying with the State Government.

(d) The State Government is implementing the Central Sector Scheme for commercial floriculture. An area of 147 hectares has been brought under flower cultivation so far. The State Government is encouraging greenhouse cultivation for export.

Rescue of Cotton Farmers from Middlemens' Clutches

1668. DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the middlemen are looting cotton farmers especially in Andhra Pradesh by denying them remunerative prices for their produce;

(b) the price of cotton fixed by the Cotton Corporation of India and the price at which the cotton farmers are selling their produce in Andhra Pradesh; and